Lesson One

Objective Match:Timeline:All ObjectivesAll Periods

KEEPING A SEA JOURNAL

There is a long tradition of journal writing at sea. Much of what we know about life on ships in the age of sail comes to us by way of first-hand written accounts.

Purpose: This lesson will combine the reading of some known sea journals with an opportunity for students to construct and keep their own. Keeping a journal will help students reflect on their themed exploration of California's past and geography.

What Students Will Do:

- Student's will construct their own sea journals and decorate them to reflect the theme (see appendix for book making ideas).
- Students will keep their journals throughout your study of "California and the Sea." (Most of the lessons included have a journal activity)
- You will guide student's reading of several sea journal passages and ask students to reflect on them in writing.

What to Know:

Three common forms of journaling occured on board ship. They were: the **ship's log**, **personal journals**, and **letter writing**. All three of these forms will help you guide students writing.

Of the three, *ship logs* were the most prevalent because a captain was obliged to keep a running record of all occurrences in a voyage. The log was a legal document. A typical log entry would begin with the time, date, approximate location, and a report on the weather.

The log keeper commonly noted anything that might benefit their country or sponsors in the future, such as the location of safe harbors, exploitable resources (timber, minerals, or wild game for example), and ocean currents.

If students choose to keep a ship's log have them come up with a standard format which they will use consistently. The date and time should always begin an entry.

Because of the legal nature of logs most of them had a 'just the facts' tone. However, many logs also included personal observations.

The *personal diary* was another common form of writing on ships. Of all the known sea journals none is more relevant to the study of "California and the Sea" than Richard Henry Dana's. This journal resulted in his publishing of *Two Years Before the Mast*, the most important account of life at sea in American literature.

Sea journals resemble diaries in style and format, but usually have a more personal tone. Like logs, however, most entries did include a date and location.

Another common form of sea writing was the *personal letter*. Some letters from sailors and officers on voyages were collected and published. Enoch Carter Cloud's diary, written as a series of letters to his family, is one of the great chronicles of a whaler's life at sea.

Some students may prefer this format because it gives them a clear audience. You may suggest that they write to a family member or friend about their maritime experiences.

Journal Activities:

Introduce the sea journal by telling students that their study of "California and the Sea" will be like an imaginary voyage, and that they will keep a written account of their experiences along the way.

Entries from R.H. Dana's narrative and of Vicoria Shorey, daughter of the whaling ship captain, William Shorey are included as prompts to journal entries. Ask students to imagine that they are one of Dana's shipmates in the same situation and write an entry of their own from their perspective.

Wrap-up and Reflection: Many opportunities should be provided so that students might share their journal entries with one another. This might take the form of an author's chair reading, dramatization, or a student authored book based on journal entries. You might also ask students to develop interactive journals with you or other students.

Connections:

art: bookmaking, drawing

mathematics: dates, adding and subtracting dates

science: science journal keeping

language arts: journal writing, genre studies

music: sea chanties

About Richard Henry Dana:

Richard Henry Dana wrote the most notable narrative of life at sea in the 19th century. It is also the most relevant to our purpose as it chronicles a journey from the eastern seaboard around the southern tip of South America, Cape Horn, to the California Coast on the trading ship *Pilgrim*. His voyage lasted 3 years, from 1834 to 1837.

Dana wrote *Two Years Before the Mast* several years after his return to Boston using the journal he kept onboard while sailing. *Two Years* is a vivid account of all aspects of sea life with particular attention to the life of the ordinary seaman (who lived *before the mast* or in the foc'sle).

About William Shorey:

Shorey was born in Barbados in 1859 descended from African slaves. Shorey was typical of the captains of his day; he started as a 15 year old ordinary seaman to become captain of his own ship by his mid 30's. As a captain he was evenhanded with his crew and courageous under extreme pressure. In 1891 his ship the *Alexander* was lost to the Arctic ice pack in the Bering Sea. Nevertheless, he saved the entire crew. After decades of work at sea, he retired to his home in Oakland, CA in 1908 where he lived as a respected leader in the community until his death in 1918.